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Allegiances

ThunderClan

Leader: Poppystar - a reddish tanned she-cat with glowing green eyes

Deputy: Swiftdrop - a black-and-white tom with dark blue eyes

Medicine Cat: Rosebriar - a cream-and-white she-cat with bright blue eyes

Apprentice, Rabbitpaw

Warriors:

Wolfstep - a dark grey tom with lighter grey tinged underfur and green eyes

Apprentice, Willowpaw

Ravenfall - a pitch black tom with a white chest and a single white paw; green eyes

Dewdrop - a light grey she-cat with black tabby stripes and blue eyes

Dawnlight - a dark tan-and-cream she-cat with bright golden eyes

Apprentice, Pebblepaw

Brambleheart - a tall brown tom with dark brown speckles on his back and a white belly; amber eyes

Apprentices

Pebblepaw - a dark grey tom with white paws and dark blue eyes

Willowpaw - a light grey she-cat with a darker grey tinged pelt and paws; bright green eyes

Queens

Berrydapple - a white she-cat with dark crimson dapples and blue eyes (Mother to Dapplekit - a dark brown she-cat with white dapples and green eyes, and Aspenkit - a brown tom with white paws and tail-tip; amber eyes.)

Puddlefrost - a light grey she-cat with white tinged paws and tail-tip. (Keeper of the nursery.)

Elders

Driftface - a dusty brown tom with a chestnut belly and yellow eyes

Sorreldust - a bi-color calico she-cat with dark green eyes

RiverClan

Leader: Cedarstar - a black tom with a grey tinged muzzle; blue eyes

Deputy: Frostsong - a white she-cat with bright blue eyes

Medicine Cat: Duskbriar - a scraggly brown tom with a clawed muzzle and amber eyes

Shad ow Clan

Leader: Ivystar - a grey-and-white bi-color she-cat with piercing green eyes

Deputy: Tigerwhisker - a dark brown she-cat with black tiger stripes and blue eyes

Medicine Cat: Ravencry - a black she-cat with bright green eyes

Apprentice, Shadestep

Wind Clan

Leader: Spiderstar - a black tom with unusually long legs and dark amber eyes

Deputy: Tinyfang - a grey she-cat with unusually short fangs and green eyes

Medicine Cat: Deerspot - a chestnut she-cat with white dapples and green eyes

Cats Outside The Clans

Nyx - a dark tanned tom with glowing amber eyes

Prologue

Three lithe feline figures weaved throughout the wide trunks of the oak trees that were towering overhead, their long branches splitting a ray of moonlight into several more. The soft sound of ruffling leaves above the group of cats seemed to have calmed their nerves, but not quite all the way.

"Are you sure of what you heard, Wolfstep?" A black-and-white tom spoke, his voice deep and calm. "I don't see or hear anything."

"Yes, Swiftdrop." A dark grey tom replied, looking grim. "There was a rustle, just here." He padded stiffly over to a hazel bush and sniffed around. "It's almost as if it disappeared into thin air..."

"What did?" A black tom trotted forward, his tail lashing impatiently. "There's nothing here, Wolfstep. You're exaggerating." His green eyes narrowed into slits as Wolfstep whipped around, snarling at the smaller tom.

"That's enough, you two." Swiftdrop warned, his voice still calm. "We'll all split up and look for anything-.." He paused, thinking of suitable words. "Out of place.." He flicked his tail for the two to step away from each other and turned away, sniffing the bushes around the area.

They had only been searching for a few heartbeats before they heard a muffled gasp. "H-Hello?" The voice was gruff and tired. Swiftdrop turned his head towards the sound as Wolfstep padded forward warily.

"Here," Wolfstep called to the other members of his evening patrol. Once the other cats had joined them, they could all see what had been puzzling them for so long.

A dark, almost cinnamon colored, long-haired tom with a plumy tail lay still on the ground, his pelt scarred and his muzzle was grey with age. He looked as though he could barely move his tail, let

alone his whole body. He twitched an ear as the group of cats approached, his amber eyes tired and calm. He didn't seem alarmed by being outnumbered.

Ravenfall stepped forward, his green eyes lit with fury. "Why are you on ThunderClan territory?" His question loud and demanding. The stranger didn't move, didn't even jump at the small cats harsh words. Swiftdrop spoke up.

"Hush, Ravenfall," the tom growled with a warning edge to his voice. "We must find out why he's here. We-"

"Let's just attack him!" Ravenfall exclaimed exasperatedly. "It's not like he could fight back. He'd be an easy target. Look at him, he's probably been in our forest for moons. We should just-"

"Enough, Ravenfall," Swiftdrop hissed, his voice now hard. "Last I checked, who was the deputy? Me or you?" The deputy's long tail lashed impatiently, and when the smaller warrior said nothing, he continued. "Good. Then we will find out who this strange cat is and what he wants."

They turned back to the scathed loner, who seemed to be amused by the younger warrior's arrogance. "The name's Nyx, not stranger." he corrected them gently. "I don't want anything from you, and I do not wish to take anything. Just leave me here overnight and I'll be gone from your territory at dawn tomorrow. You won't even know I was here. Sound fair?"

Swiftdrop thought about Nyx's words. Wolfstep padded forward before the deputy could speak. The large grey warrior's eyes were soft as he spoke. "Nyx, you look as if you can't go anywhere.. And I'm sure we all agree," he paused and narrowed his eyes at Ravenfall before he continued. "What do you say, Swiftdrop?"

The black-and-white tom twitched his tail in thought, though he didn't need to think for long before nodding his head. "Of course we'll help you," he meowed evenly. "We wouldn't treat a starving cat as enemy. We'll take you back to our camp and-"

"Are you joking?" Ravenfall was yowling again. Swiftdrop

rounded on him, glaring. "This cat can probably get around just fine! I'm sure he's been stealing our prey! I'll make sure he *won't* be able to move when *I'm* done with him.." The smaller black cat crouched low to the ground, ready to pounce on the weak and pitiful tom.

Wolfstep stepped in his way. "Watch yourself, young warrior, or need I remind you that you were only made a warrior a moon ago." The grey tom narrowed his eyes and nodded toward Swiftdrop. "Or who's in charge here, and the fact that he's the deputy."

"He's right," Swiftdrop growled. "Now, why don't you make yourself useful and head on back to camp. Tell Poppystar we're coming, and that we're bringing a guest with us." The deputy's blue eyes became daggers as he looked over the black tom. "And if you try anything funny, you'll regret it. Am I clear?" When he nodded, Swiftdrop continued. "Good. Off you go, then."

The snarky, black tom stalked away, casting regretful glares over his shoulder at the three cats who remained in the moonlit clearing. With a final snort, the arrogant warrior disappeared between two hazel bushes on the far side from the group.

Swiftdrop turned his attention back to Nyx, then to his fellow Clanmate. "Wolfstep, would you mind going a catching something for Nyx? We won't be able to get him back to camp unless he's strong enough to get there. That is, unless you're carrying him." The deputy's whiskers twitched with amusement as Nyx spoke up.

"I'm not that fat.." The old cat rasped. "It's not as if I'm a kittypet.." He stretched his muzzle towards the sky, exposing his bare neck. No collar. "But.. I don't think I'd like to carry one of you back to my home either, so.. fair enough.." The old cinnamon-colored tom shrugged.

Wolfstep let out a small chuckle before he disappeared from the clearing at the opposite side of their ignorant Clanmate that had left only moments ago. Once the bulky warrior's long grey tail had gone, Swiftdrop turned his head back toward the stranger.

"Where'd you come from?" he inquired. "Must have been pretty

empty when it came to prey." He took in Nyx's figure again. The tom was skinny, unusually so. His ribs were jutting out of his pelt and his fur was matted, as though he hadn't groomed in days. One of his ears was torn and his amber eyes were dull.

Nyx groaned when he thought of his old home. "It seemed as though there wasn't any life there at all! My companions insisted we stay, for it was 'our home'. I'd say our deathbed.." He sighed and continued on. "I told them that I wouldn't stay.. I wasn't giving up, but they said that by leaving, it was the same. I didn't listen and came out here. Mind you, that was before I knew there was Clans living here."

The two cats' conversation was cut short as Wolfstep returned to the center of the clearing, a squirrel being carried in his jaws. "Here," he offered to Nyx, his voice muffled by squirrel fur. He dropped the squirrel by Nyx's paws and sat down. "Eat quickly. Dawn will be coming soon," He looked to the sky, then added, "We don't want Ravenfall spreading gossip throughout the Clan about you."

Nyx began to eat ravenously, tearing the squirrel's flesh in quick, hungry bites. Once he'd finished, he nimbly propped himself up on his forepaws, beginning to rise gently. Swiftdrop and Wolfstep rushed by his side, ready to catch the old cat if he fell. He rose slowly, slipping a bit but regaining himself in a heartbeat. He finally balanced on his paws and took a few wary steps forward. He looked up at the two warriors determinedly, his eyes brighter than before. "I'm ready when you are." he assured them.

Swiftdrop and Wolfstep shared an uneasy glance at the tom's eagerness to get moving, for he still looked to weak to go anywhere, but he seemed sure he was ready and so they began to head towards camp. Swiftdrop let Wolfstep take the lead, while he stayed behind with Nyx.

They had been walking for quite a while until they where almost at the camp, when Nyx turned to look at Swiftdrop with a steady gaze. He had a distant, almost scary look in his eyes, as though he knew more than he was letting on. He spoke mysterious words, as he said:

"You won't regret helping me. I can promise you and your Clan that."

Chapter One

"Rabbitpaw!"

The pale brown apprentice turned his head at his mentor's call. His tail kinked over his back, the tom trotted towards the medicine den and poked his head in. "Yes, Rosebriar?" he called back. The cream-and-white she-cat twitched an ear, looking worried.

"Any sign of the patrol yet?" she asked, her tail lashing. She'd been fidgeting ever since the Clan got the news from Ravenfall. She'd even made him sit at a gap of the den, watching the camp entrance until the group arrived. Rabbitpaw thought before replying to her.

"Not yet," he mewed, shrugging his shoulders. He then decided to change the subject. "Are we running low on anything? Marigold? Yarrow? Catmint?" He lashed his tail when she shook her head, but she then blinked at him.

"I'm sorry I'm being such a pain in the tail.." she admitted. "I'm just worried about this.. stranger.." Her eyes brightened after she thought for a moment. "I do have something you can do." She turned around and grabbed a few yarrow leaves. "Would you mind taking this to Sorreldust? She's been having pain in her joints."

Rabbitpaw dipped his head. "I wouldn't mind at all, Rosebriar," he meowed softly. He gently took the herbs from his mentor and headed towards the exit. *I like Sorreldust.. She's not as cranky as most elders. That goes for Driftface as well..*

"Oh, and Rabbitpaw?" Rosebriar caught him just before he reached the lichen that hung over the gap in the cave. He turned his head and twitched an ear, acknowledging that he was listening to her. "There's some extra moss we keep behind the nursery. Will you ask Berrydapple and Puddlefrost if it's okay that we borrow some?" She curled her tail around her paws as she sat. "From what Ravenfall said about how weak that tom is, he'll want somewhere

comfortable to lay once Poppystar has spoken to him."

Rabbitpaw nodded his head respectfully to the she-cat. "Of course," he mewed, his words muffled by the herbs he carried in his mouth. He turned and rushed out of the den, making his way quickly over to the elders' den. A voice distracted him.

"Rabbitpaw? Is everything alright?"

The dust-colored apprentice turned to face the source of the voice and saw Willowpaw. His ears immediately burned at the sight of the pretty grey she-cat. Her big, green eyes shone with concern in the sunlight. The darker grey tinge on her pelt blended with her lighter grey so perfectly. The medicine cat apprentice had never seen a she-cat as pretty as she.

He realized he had been staring at her, for she had called his name several more times. "Y-yeah.. Everything's fine.. Just heading to the elders' den.." he stuttered, and flattened his ears in frustration at his clumsiness. *Why does she do this to me..?* "So, if you'll excuse me..." he muttered, eager to get away from her. "I'll catch you later.." With that, he hurried away, leaving her confused.

"Oh, okay.." he heard her sigh. The young she-cat turned and padded back toward her brother, who glaring at them. Pebblepaw knew that he had a crush on her, but respected the warrior code to much to have much sympathy for the older tom.

Rabbitpaw closed his eyes in defeat and returned his mind to his set task. He entered the elders' den, meeting eyes with Sorreldust almost immediately. She smiled, her eyes soft and sympathetic. "I'm sorry, Rabbitpaw.." Her tail curled around her body.

"Oh, you mean Willowpaw?" he asked, and shrugged it off, hoping it was convincing. "Don't worry about it.. I- I'll get over it.." He sat down next to Sorreldust and set the herbs before her. "Here you go. I've heard about your aching joints."

She didn't seem to pay the leaves in front her any mind as she focused her attention on Rabbitpaw. "You don't just *get over* a crush like that, young one." she purred, her green eyes sparkling. "I

remember when I was ThunderClan's medicine cat... I was head-over-tail for-"

"Look, Sorreldust," Rabbitpaw interrupted. "I apologize for cutting this romantic story short, but I have to go do another task before the patrol gets back. Perhaps I'll return later; you can tell me the rest of the story then?" When she nodded at him understandingly, he nodded towards the yarrow that still lay at her paws. "Make sure you eat those. They'll help your joint pain."

"Thank you, Rabbitpaw." she purred and licked up the herbs the medicine cat apprentice had brought to her. Rabbitpaw stayed to be sure she ate all of them before he bid her farewell and headed towards the nursery.

He nosed his way into the den and looked around, adjusting to the dim light of the nursery. He let the warm, milky scent of the den take him back to his kit days with his sister, Dawnlight, who was now a warrior. He was pulled back to reality when Puddlefrost spoke.

"Hello, Rabbitpaw." she purred, her tail waving in greeting. "What can we do for you?" She stifled a meow as Berrydapple awoke and her two kits, Dapplekit and Aspenkit, let out excited squeals and hurtled towards him.

"Rabbitpaw! Rabbitpaw!" they cried out in sync. Their tiny tails lashed frantically as they skidded to a stop in front of the older cat. "Hello!"

Rabbitpaw purred and crouched at eye-level with the kits. "I've come to ask if I could borrow some moss from behind the nursery. We have a guest that will be here soon." He straightened again as Aspenkit leaped at his face, but only ended up flying under his belly.

"Oh, yes." Berrydapple meowed. "We've all heard about that. We'd be happy to lend you some moss." She chuckled slightly as she heard Aspenpaw sneeze from behind Rabbitpaw. "Aspenkit," she called out to him. "Come back inside, please." The queen's blue eyes gleamed at her kit's clumsiness and she let out a purr as Dapplekit

chimed in, her own green eyes brimming with amusement.

"Yeah, Aspenkit!" she sqeaked, raising her chin as though she were a Clan leader. "Listen to Berrydapple! Come back inside this instant!" The young she-kit was now standing, her plumy tail raised. "You're only 4 moons old!"

"And you're not?" Aspenkit shot back, making Dapplekit curl her lip in surprise. "Besides, why would I come back in side now? The patrol's here!" Berrydapple's fur bristled as she leaped to her paws and rushed past Rabbitpaw. She snatched Aspenkit up by his scruff, getting an irritated squeal from her son in return.

Rabbitpaw turned tail, calling thanks back to the queens, before rushing behind the nursery and grabbing a mouthful of moss and scampering back to the medicine den without looking back. He burst through the entrance and Rosebriar whirled around, clearly startled.

"Great StarClan, Rabbitpaw!" she exclaimed exasperatedly. Her plumy pelt was fluffed up to make herself appear larger than she really was, but she forced her fur to lie flat. She sat down again and sighed. "Oh good, you got the moss. Well done, but maybe next time, try not to tear the lichen down when you return." She purred at him, but noticed his pale blue eyes were wide with- not fear, but surprise and he was panting. "You can set the moss down now.."

"R-Right, sorry.." he tried to speak, but his words muffled and slurred once again because of the moss he carried. He dropped it in the corner and turned to face his mentor again, only to see that she was eyeing him suspiciously.

"Why are you so shaken?" she asked, her long tail twitching nervously. "You as though you were just nose-to-nose with a fox."

He met his mentor's eyes steadily. "We should start building the nest." he meowed, ignoring her question. "The patrol's just arrived. They just scared me is all." He started to spread out the moss into a comfortable nest, so the stranger could rest properly.

"We'd better go out there." Rosebriar mewed. Only moments

after she'd said that, Poppystar's voice rang out over the clearing. Rabbitpaw nodded and motioned with his tail in agreement. They both took their place beside the Highrock as the Clan gathered around the center of the clearing.

Once every cat was gathered and listening, Poppystar leaped onto the Highrock, her crimson-tanned pelt reflecting the sun's light and her bright green eyes held nothing but curiosity. "Stranger, why have you come to ThunderClan?" she called to him.

Some ThunderClan warriors stepped out of the way to reveal the stranger. His pelt was matted and unkempt, and his amber eyes shone brightly as he met Poppystar's green gaze. He spoke:

"My name is Nyx, and I've come to save your Clan's life."

Chapter Two

Rabbitpaw helped Nyx to his nest in the medicine den, laying the old cat gently onto the moss. He flicked his ear forward at the old cat. "Rosebriar, my mentor, will be back in a few moments with some prey and herbs to help you regain your strength." The apprentice turned around and padded over towards the herb store, running his paw over the herb he needed. "I'd give it to you now, but Rosebriar wants to make sure you get the right amount."

"Thank you, young healer." Nyx rasped, dipping his head. The cinnamon-colored tom turned his head around to groom his back, revealing a large gash on the side of his throat. The old cat winced, but tried to hide it.

"Woah," Rabbitpaw exclaimed, stopping Nyx from hiding it. "That needs to be treated! It could get infected." The apprentice raised his tail when Nyx opened his mouth to argue. "You're not going to convince me otherwise." Turning around again, he grabbed some marigold and cobwebs. "Let's see..." he muttered, knowing he was forgetting something. " Ah! Poppyseeds."

He returned to Nyx's side, who was eyeing the apprentice carefully. "I'm not going to poison you, for StarClan's sake!" he sighed. "Flip onto your other side, please. It'll make it easier for me to reach the wound."

Nyx obeyed and flipped over. Rabbitpaw took a few marigold petals in his mouth and began to chew them into a poultice. He spat the chewed flower into a swab of cobwebs and applied them gently onto the gash. "It's not infected, thankfully." Rabbitpaw observed, holding the cobwebs in place. "Try to make sure this stays in place, and me or Rosebriar will re-dress it tomorrow."

"Thank you, again." Nyx purred and stared at the apprentice. He returned to his grooming and Rabbitpaw stopped in his tracks,

thinking for a moment.

I have a little while before Rosebriar returns.. Perhaps Nyx won't mind if I ask a few questions.. The apprentice looked over his shoulder at the old tom, his tail flicking nervously. "Hey, uh.. Nyx?" he called behind him.

Nyx twitched his ear as he looked up at the young tom. "Yes? What is it?" he asked patiently. The old cat's amber eyes were pale as he watched Rabbitpaw turn and sit down in front of him. He flicked his tail for the apprentice to speak.

"What did you mean by, you're 'here to save the Clan'? Save us from what?" he asked, looking Nyx in the eyes. Rabbitpaw ducked his head as Nyx closed his eyes, thinking for a moment. He kept them closed once he spoke again.

"There is a reason I have come to the Clans, young healer," he meowed solemnly. "There is a great danger to come to all the Clans.. ThunderClan, RiverClan, ShadowClan, and WindClan.." His eyes were still closed.

"W-What do you mean? You don't even come from the Clans! How do you know them all? How-" The apprentice's rambling questions were cut off as Nyx opened his eyes, a bright light shining from them, making Rabbitpaw flinch. The light could've filled up the entire den.

Once the light from his eyes had cleared, Rabbitpaw could make out a forest. It seemed to be peaceful, but within heartbeats of staring at it, flames engulfed the bramble bushes and trees, burning everything down. The apprentice's heartbeat drummed in his ears, but over that he could hear the crackling of the flames, trees falling, and- cats yowling, terror clearly iced their voices.

Nyx blinked and it was gone. The sounds, the image, all of it. Rabbitpaw was left bristling as Nyx stared at him. "W-Why have you shown me this...?" Nyx didn't answer, he only stared at the apprentice, his amber eyes gleaming with nothing but grief and a hint of-... faith?

He soon spoke the words of the prophecy StarClan had been waiting to give SunClan. The prophecy that would save them from mass destruction.

"***An arising flame will perish your beloved forests. The Clans will be destroyed, one-by-one, until there is nothing left to favor but ash and soot***."

Rosebriar soon returned to the den, her jaws were laden with herbs. "Hello, Rabbitpaw." she purred. "And Nyx. I trust you're settled in?" Rabbitpaw watched as she dropped the herbs by the older cat's nest and sat down. The apprentice stiffened as his mentor caught sight over the cobwebs attached to Nyx's neck. "What's this?"

Rabbitpaw opened his mouth to answer, but Nyx spoke before he could. "Your trainee over there helped me with this." he purred to her. "I had a gash on by neck that could've gotten infected." He chuckled before continuing. "I told him it would be fine, but he wasn't having it."

Rosebriar looked at her apprentice, pride reflected in her blue eyes. "Rabbitpaw, is this true?" she asked, padding over to her apprentice. She wrapped her tail around him as she sat down. "Did you treat his wound?"

Rabbitpaw's ears burned with embarrassment. "Y-yes.. I didn't want to leave untreated until you got back." he explained. "He could've gotten dirt or moss in it." The brown apprentice's tail swayed back and forth over the dust nervously.

"Well then," she purred. "It seems as though you handled yourself well, and Nyx seems comfortable with you helping him. So," She stood and raised her tail. "It *is* half-moon tonight.." She smiled brighter when Rabbitpaw's eyes widened.

"You mean....?" he gasped, his pale blue eyes shining. "I-I'm ready?"

"Indeed, you are." she assured him. "I'll ask Swiftdrop if I can ask Sorreldust and Driftface if they would mind some company. And we'll leave at sunset." She turned to pad out of the den, but

Rabbitpaw called her back.

"Uh, actually, Rosebriar?" He shifted his paws as she stared at him. "I promised Sorreldust I'd go and talk to her again because I cut her short this morning. Would you mind if I went instead? It would give a chance to treat Nyx how you wanted to."

Rosebriar dipped her head. "Of course, Rabbitpaw." she mewed. "And thank you." She turned to Nyx and nodded to him before returning to her herb store. Grabbing what she needed, she turned back to the elderly cat and began to treat him.

In the clearing, Rabbitpaw looked around for Swiftdrop, but didn't see him anywhere. "Come on.. Where are you..?" he grumbled, getting irritated. "What am I? Blind?" He finally spotted the ThunderClan deputy leaving Poppystar's den. The apprentice trotted over to him, letting out a small call to him.

"Ah, Rabbitpaw. Hello," he meowed once he spotted the brown tom. "What can I do for you?"

"I was wondering if you'd mind if we moved Nyx to the elders' den while Rosebriar and I are at the Moonpool?" he asked. "I think they'd enjoy the company."

"Of course," he agreed, dipping his head. "Go on ahead." Rabbitpaw murmured his thanks and headed off to begin moving Nyx.

Rosebriar led the way up to the Moonpool, Rabbitpaw at her side. Once they reached the ledge that hung over the pool of stars, they were greeted by the other medicine cats, Duskbriar of RiverClan, Ravencry and Shadestep of ShadowClan, and Deerspot of WindClan.

"There's ThunderClan!" Deerspot meowed, dipping her head graciously to the two.

"Hello, everyone." Rosebriar spoke up. "Before we share tongues with our ancestors, I have a ceremony to address." She looked at Rabbitpaw, her blue eyes shining. "Rabbitpaw, step forward." Once

Rabbitpaw was before his mentor, she looked to the sky began to speak the ancient words of the cermony. "I, Rosebriar, medicine cat of ThunderClan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down on this apprentice. He has trained hard to understand the ways of a medicine cat, and with your help he will serve his Clan for many moons." She made direct eye-contact with Rabbitpaw once more, and went on. "Rabbitpaw, do you promise to uphold the ways of a medicine cat, to stand apart from rivalry between Clan and Clan and to protect all cats equally, even at the cost of your life?"

Rabbitpaw dipped his head, closing his shining blue eyes. "I do," he murmured.

Rosebriar dipped her head. "Very well," she mewed, raising her tail. "Then by the powers of I give you your true name as a medicine cat. Rabbitpaw, from this moment you will be known as Rabbitstep. StarClan honors your honor and your skill, and we welcome you as a full medicine cat of ThunderClan."

The medicine cats around the Moonpool began to cheer loudly. "Rabbitstep! Rabbitstep!" Pride swelled in the medicine cat's chest as his new name rang in his ears.

Once everyone was finished congratulating Rabbitstep, they all settled down to speak with StarClan. Rabbitstep carefully touched his nose to the icy water of the Moonpool and waited.

Will they give me more information about the prophecy? Do they even know Nyx? Will they-?

"Hello, Rabbitstep."

A soft, male voice made Rabbitstep's eyes shoot open. He looked around wildly until his eyes landed on a tall, cream colored tom. Stars dotted his pelt and his hazel eyes shone. "Who are you?" Rabbitstep gasped.

The StarClan cat ignored Rabbitstep's question and smiled at the apprentice, looking him in the eye.

"***We've been expecting you, Rabbitstep.***"

Chapter Three

"We've been expecting you, Rabbitstep." The cream tom look Rabbitstep in the eyes, and when the medicine cat didn't respond, he went on. "I am Aspenfall. I was once among the ranks of ThunderClan as a warrior."

"Are you here to tell me more about the prophecy Nyx gave me?" Rabbitstep asked, his eyes glinting with hope.

"Sort of," Aspenfall sighed. "More of an 'add-on' to that.." His plumy tail curled around his paws as he looked expectantly at Rabbitstep. The medicine cat was returning the StarClan tom's response with a disbelieving gaze.

"An 'add-on'?" Rabbitstep gasped exasperatedly. "I've not even figured out the first part! You can't possibly give me another prophecy without helping me with the first one!" The pale brown cat's tail lashed furiously, though he was attempting to remain calm with the StarClan cat.

"You don't need me to tell you what the first part means, for once I give you the second verse, you'll figure it out," Aspenfall looked away and uttered something under his breath. It almost sounded like "penalty", but Rabbitstep was sure that wasn't it. Aspenfall lifted his gaze to meet Rabbitstep's as he began to speak the words of the prophecy. "Mistakes will be made before they can be fixed, only then will there be peace." He then started to fade.

"W-wait! Aspenfall!" Rabbitstep yowled. "That didn't help me at all! I don't understand!" Rabbitstep called to him until his throat stung, but to no avail. Aspenfall was gone.

When Rabbitstep returned to camp with Rosebriar, word was spreading throughout the camp, so fast that Rabbitstep hadn't gotten to the clearing before Dapplekit and Aspenkit came barreling towards him. "Rabbitpaw! Rabbitpaw!" they called his old name. Rabbitstep smirked and sat down, tail curling around his paws.

"It's Rabbit*step* now," he purred proudly, puffing out his chest. "Now, what is it, kits?" They leaped about around his paws, weaving and squeaking.

"Willowpaw and Pebblepaw are becoming warriors today!" Dapplekit squealed in her high-pitched voice, while Aspenkit pounced on Rabbitstep's tail.

"Everyone's talking about it!" the tom added.

"Well then, I'm glad I got back in time!" The medicine cat apprentice sighed. Rabbitstep let his green eyes wander the camp, until he saw Berrydapple trotting over to them. He stood as the queen came to a halt.

"Ah," she sighed. "Hello, Rabbitpaw. These two weren't causing you trouble, were they?" She cast a stern look at her kits as she added, "They should've told me where they'd gone." The kits piped up before Rabbitstep could answer.

"We were just telling him about the warrior ceremony later today!" Aspenkit retorted, before Dapplekit interrupted him.

"And it's Rabbitstep, now!" she squeaked, making her mother look up at Rabbitstep with admiring eyes.

"Oh?" she exclaimed. "You've received your full name! Congratulations, Rabbitstep." She turned to her kits. "Now, shoo, the both of you." She ushered them back to the nursery, one, periodically, squeaking in protest.

"Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather beneath the Highrock for a Clan meeting!"

Rabbitstep's thoughts were interrupted by Poppystar's call. He looked up at the sky, realizing it was sunhigh. He padded over to

join his gathering Clanmates, sitting down outside the medicine den next to Rosebriar, who looked troubled by something. "Everything alright, Rosebriar?"

She jumped, startled by Rabbitstep's sudden appearance. "You startled me, Rabbitstep," she scolded. "Yes, I'm fine." She curled her plumy tail closer to herself as she looked onto the meeting. Rabbitstep said nothing.

"I call this meeting today for one of the greatest honors of any Clan," Poppystar began. "And that, my dear Clanmates, is the making of new warriors." She scanned the crowd until she found Pebblepaw and Willowpaw, who were standing tall, their eyes shining. "Pebblepaw, Willowpaw, come forward."

The apprentices darted forward with amazing speed. Rabbitstep could tell they were excited. Poppystar smiled proudly at them before leaping down off the Highrock, standing before the two. She lifted her muzzle to look around the crowd again. "Wolfstep," she addressed. "Do you believe Willowpaw is worthy of becoming a warrior?"

The smoky-grey tom stood and lifted his chin. "Yes, Poppystar. She has been worthy for a very long time," he said, smiling at Willowpaw as he spoke. He returned to his sitting position and looked to Dawnlight, knowing the cream she-cat would be addressed next.

"Very well," she mewed. "Dawnlight? Is Pebblepaw, too, worthy of being a warrior?"

"Yes, Poppystar." she meowed, dipping her head.

"Then I, Poppystar, leader of ThunderClan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down on these two apprentices. They have trained hard to understand the ways of your noble code, and I wish to present them to you as warriors in their turn." She looked at the two. "Pebblepaw and Willowpaw, are you willing to uphold the warrior code, to protect and defend this Clan, even at the cost of your lives?"

"I do," they both mewed in chorus.

"Then by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior names." She fixed her green gaze on Pebblepaw. "Pebblepaw, from this day on, you will be known, no longer as Pebblepaw, but as Pebblelake. StarClan honors your courage and audacity." She touched her nose to his head, receiving a lick on the shoulder. "Willowpaw," she meowed, turning to the light grey apprentice. "From this day on, you will be known, no longer as Willowpaw, but as Willowfrost. StarClan honors your wisdom and your bravery."

The clearing erupted into cheers for the two newest warriors. "Willowfrost! Pebblelake!" Rabbitstep joined in without hesitation, calling out his friend's name. The two new warriors puffed their chests out with pride, before being interrupted by Poppystar.

"It's great to welcome new warriors into the Clan, but that'll have to wait for now, for I have something else to announce." She paused as the voices of her Clanmates quieted down. Once they were all quiet she continued. "Swiftdrop reported to me after the dawn patrol today that he and his patrol scented WindClan very close and even over our borders."

The clearing erupted into angered yowls and indignant snarls. Poppystar only raised her tail to silence them. "I wish for no battles or confrontations to be made unless you come across them yourselves. I only wish to send extra border patrols along the WindClan. I'll have a word with Spiderstar when I have the chance." She paused, perhaps wondering if she'd made the right decision. Finally, she flicked her tail. "Dismissed."

As soon as Poppystar leaped down from her place on the Highrock, Swiftdrop called out to his Clanmates. "I want any warrior willing to go on a patrol over here. I'll be making two!" He noticed Willowfrost and Pebblelake looking at each other confused. "You'll sit your vigil later tonight! You may still go on a patrol!"

They bounded forward and Rabbitstep watched as Swiftdrop organized them into patrols. He turned to Rosebriar as she stood. "Are you sure you're alright?" he asked softly. "You look like a startled rabbit."

"I'm fine, Rabbitstep," she assured him, though she sounded more as if she were assuring herself. "Come, let's go and see what we need to restock today." She whisked around and into the Medicine Den, Rabbitstep following.

"Alright," Rosebriar sighed after they'd gone through their herbs, throwing out old ones and counting good ones so they knew if they'd need more. "We've got enough for now, at least. Still, we'll head out later and gather some more."

"Sounds good to me, Rosebrair." Rabbitstep muttered as he stood and stretched each limb in turn. He scooped all of the rotten herbs into a pile in the corner. "I'll carry those out when we go out gathering," he told Rosebriar, receiving only a nod.

"I must go and see Poppystar," she sighed. "Can you manage for a bit by yourself?" She nudged him, flicking her tail over his ear.

"Of course I can."

She padded towards the entrance when a strangled cry came from outside, sending alarm shooting through Rabbitstep's body from ears to tail-tip.

"Rosebriar! Rabbitstep! Come quick!!"

Rabbitstep recognized the voice as Dawnlight. He and Rosebriar darted out of the den, side-by-side, and were horrified at the sight before them. The patrol that had traveled to the BreezeClan border had been attacked. Brambleheart and Ravenfall had scratches all over their sides and flanks, Willowfrost had a torn ear and a gash on her shoulder, and Dawnlight had fur missing on her tail and sides and a scratched belly.

"What is the meaning of this?" Poppystar hissed as she came forward, her tail lashing. "I said no confrontations!" She glared at Ravenfall, clearly suspecting him of provoking them. Brambleheart stepped in between them.

"Poppystar," he murmured. "You'll be surprised to find that it wasn't Ravenfall who started this fight." Ravenfall scowled at

Brambleheart's words, but Rabbitstep could tell he was grateful for his defense. "WindClan were on our side when we arrived. They were hunting in our land. We confronted them and warned them to leave, and they attacked."

"Then I apologize to you, Ravenfall." She dipped her head to him, receiving a nod from the black warrior. "I'll definitely speak to Spiderstar about this. The Gathering is in a few days, but this can't go on. I'll lead a patrol to their camp at dawn tomorrow." The leader turned to the medicine cats. "Get them cleaned up, please."

"Rabbitstep, do you think you could manage?" she asked. "I need to speak with Poppystar about something very urgent." She flicked her tail back and forth in worry.

"Of course, Rosebriar." He dipped his head and turned to his injured Clanmates. "Follow me, quick as you can." He turned and led them back to the medicine den, allowing them all to sit and rest. He called them one at a time. "Brambleheart, come here please."

Brambleheart stood carefully and padded forward, sitting down before Rabbitstep. "Do you have any major wounds? It looks to me as if you only have minor scratches. Same with you, Ravenfall." Both warriors nodded.

"That's it. Willowfrost and Dawnlight got the worst of it, it seems." Brambleheart chuckled, earning a grunt of agreement from Ravenfall, who came to sit with Brambleheart so Rabbitstep could treat them both at once.

"Ravenfall, start licking your wounds clean." Rabbitstep told him as he began to lick Brambleheart's wounds. The black warrior surprisingly cooperated the whole time Rabbitstep was treated him and Brambleheart. Once they were treated, they left, leaving the medicine cat apprentice with Dawnlight and Willowfrost. "Dawnlight?"

The light-grey she-cat came forward. She'd already licked the wounds she could reach, only leaving Rabbitstep to treat her stomach injuries, for there was nothing he could do about the missing fur. It would have to grow back on its own.

He treated her stomach with a poultice of Marigold and patched it up with cobwebs. "Come and see me tomorrow and I'll redress it." he promised. As Dawnlight walked out of the den, he remembered he had to treat Willowfrost. He looked over to her, meeting her eyes. He looked away quickly, hearing a quiet giggle come from the she-cat. "What's so funny?" he demanded.

"The way you act around me.." she mewed, giggling more. "You make it so obvious, dear Rabbitstep." She smirked at him as the medicine cat felt his ears burn with intense heat. He shook his head and began to treat her.

"I have no clue what you're talking about," he meowed stubbornly, scowling at her. He began to treat the gash on her shoulder, which was difficult with her giggling. "Stop it, will you?" he snapped. He hadn't meant to snap at her, he just got so nervous around her it annoyed him, especially when someone brought up his crush on her, never mind that it was her who'd done it!

"Sorry," she sighed before busting into another fit of laughter.

"I think a WindClan warrior might have hit you on the head really hard.." he muttered. He dressed her ear and shoulder with cobwebs. "Alright, you're treated, now stop taunting me and leave, will you?" He whipped around, putting all the herbs he didn't use back.

"Don't dismiss me," she teased. "I wanted to tell you something, mouse-brain."

"Well, sorry to inform you, but you can't laugh at someone and taunt them at the same time." he snapped, he tail lashing in annoyance.

Willowfrost draped her tail over his back. "Let me speak, will you?" Her voice softened like silk. Rabbitstep turned and gazed at her, awaiting her words. "I like you too, Rabbitstep." she purred in his ear, leaving Rabbitstep flustered. He looked back at her again and she was gone.

Rabbitstep followed Dewdrop and Rosebriar in the forest. "Scent

any Marigold? We're running low on that now." he called to Rosebriar.

"Afraid not-" she stopped dead in the middle of her sentence and stared into the distance, her eyes darted back and forth around her surroundings,

"Are you okay, Rosebriar?" Rabbitstep asked warily. She didn't answer. Instead her eyes locked on a bush across the clearing. "Rosebr-...." He followed her gaze and was met with glinting hazel eyes and white teeth.

Dewdrop crouched near them and whispered in their ear.

"Run.."

Chapter Four

Thrashing brambles and branches whacked Rabbitstep in the face as he raced away. He knew he couldn't lead the fox to camp, but he did know there was a border patrol sent out for the ShadowClan border. All he could do is pray they were still there.

He ran alongside Rosebriar, for she wanted him to stay with her. Dewdrop raced close behind them, the fox hard on her paws. Rabbitstep tried to urge Rosebriar to run faster, but to his utter terror, she tripped on loose root that stretched along their path.

A terrible, blood-curdling screech rang out, making Rabbitstep want to curl up in a ball and just let death take him. Hesitantly, he turned around, noticing the fox wasn't chasing them any longer. What Rabbitstep saw, made him freeze in grief and horror.

Rosebriar's leg was caught in the root, holding her down. The she-cat was thrashing to get free as she heard the thundering paws of the fox. The flame-color animal burst through the ferns, spotting the cream-and-white she-cat, trapped, and darted towards her. "Rosebriar! Move! Please!!" he screeched, his throat wrenching up, making him choke on his words.

The fox grabbed Rosebriar by the scruff, dragging her roughly from the root and tossed her in the air like she were a piece of fresh-kill. The fox leaped into the air, catching her by the stomach and shaking her rapidly, back-and-forth. Rosebriar didn't seem to be conscious anymore, for her head rolled back as though she were... No. Rabbitstep couldn't think that way.

"Stop! You flea-ridden monster!!!" Dewdrop yowled. She leaped onto the fox, joined by Rabbitstep, who slashed the fox with all his

strength, making it throw Rosebriar to the side. "Rabbitstep, get her out of here!"

Giving a quick nod, he leaped off the fox, lifting Rosebriar carefully onto his back and rushed her to camp, knowing he needed to send more warriors to help Dewdrop. "Help!" he called out as he neared camp. "Someone! Dewdrop needs help! Quick!"

Ravenfall and Wolfstep appeared, their eyes wide. "Rabbitstep! What happened?" Wolfstep demanded, Ravenfall at his side.

"Fox..." Rabbitstep murmured, gasping for air. "Dewdrop is fighting alone! She needs help!" Without another word, Ravenfall and Wolfstep took off into the forest. *They can find her..* he thought to himself. He needed to get Rosebriar into camp.

As soon as he entered, Berrydapple herded her kits into the nursery, not wanting them to see the medicine cat in the state she was. Poppystar and Swiftdrop raced over, their eyes frantic. "Rosebriar!" Poppystar yowled. "Rabbitstep.. How could this have happened..?"

"I'll explain later," he mewed quickly, still panting. "We need to get her to the medicine den and treated as quickly as possible!" Swiftdrop nodded, rushing to Rabbitstep's side to aid him in carrying Rosebriar to the medicine den, Poppystar rushing after them.

Once they settled the medicine cat on a soft bed of moss, Rabbitstep began to inspect her. What first caught his attention was her leg; the one that had been caught in the root and, moments later, ripped from it. There was a large cut made by the root, as well as.. He froze. Rabbitstep's heart dropped as he saw the leg was also twisted; painfully so.

The tom's gaze dragged itself to look at the bite marks on her scruff and her belly. Then to look at the cut on her head, which he had no idea how it got there. *Perhaps when the fox threw her down..? She must've hit her head on a rock..* he thought, wincing at the wound.

He looked up to meet Poppystar's worried green gaze. "Will she be all right? Please tell me she'll be all right!" she wailed, her ears pinning back against her head. Swiftdrop sat next to her, attempting to comfort her, but the deputy knew he wasn't helping, despite his smooth words.

"Allow Rabbitstep to work," he mewed gently in his leader's ear. "He knows what he's doing, I'm sure of it." He shifted his blue gaze to Rabbitstep, nodding to him as he got Poppystar to sit down.

Rabbitstep went to his herb store and pulled out the herbs he needed, along with cobwebs. *I'll need to treat her leg as well...* he reminded himself, deciding to do it after. He sat beside his mentor, not wanting to look at her, but knowing he had to. He began to dress the bite-marks on Rosebriar's neck and stomach, and her head cut. He looked up as Dawnlight entered, looking nervous.

"Sorry to interrupt," she meowed, dipping her head. She looked to Poppystar. "Dewdrop, Ravenfall, and Wolfstep have returned. They've chased the fox off." She shuffled her paws, not wanting to upset her leader in any way during this situation. "They wish to speak with you."

Poppystar hesitated, but nodded. "Alright," she sighed and got to her paws. "Come on, Swiftdrop. Let's leave Rabbitstep to work." Rabbitstep winced as her voice broke and watched her leave. He decided to call to her.

"I'll keep you updated," he assured her, dipping his head.

After dressing her leg and her cuts, he'd been able to treat Dewdrop, who was asleep in her nest. Luckily, Ravenfall and Wolfstep's wound weren't serious; just minor scratches, needing only to be cleaned.

Rabbitstep lay in his nest, his eyes never leaving Rosebriar's barely breathing form. He hadn't intended to sleep while in his nest, for he was simply waiting for his mentor, his friend, to awaken and tell him she would be alright. The medicine cat's eyes burned as he feared he may never hear his mentor's soothing and assuring voice again. He closed his eyes as memories flooded back into his mind.

His naming ceremony..*"I, Poppystar, name you Rabbitpaw, medicine cat apprentice of ThunderClan!"*

His assessments.. *"What's this herb, Rabbitpaw?"*

His mistakes.. *"I said to gather catmint, not horsetail! You're half asleep today, Rabbitpaw!"*

Her encouragement.. *"It's alright, Rabbitpaw. You were close. Try again. Dock and.. what?"*

StarClan's acceptance.. *"You will be an honored medicine cat of ThunderClan."*

Rabbitstep.. *"You will be known, no longer as Rabbitpaw, but as Rabbitstep!"*

Rabbitstep... *"Rosebriar! Move!! Please!!!"*

Rabbitstep.... *"Please tell me she will be all right!"*

"Rabbitstep....."

Rabbitstep's eyes shot open as he heard a raspy voice calling his voice. He lifted his head to look at his mentor. "R-Rosebriar..?" he hissed to her softly. He watched her carefully, the fur on his neck rising. When she didn't respond, Rabbitstep guessed he'd imagined a voice and lay his head down again, forcing the hair on his neck down.

"Rabbitstep," the voice called out again. "Please, come quick! We-.. I.. don't have much time.."

The medicine cat rushed over to push his nose into her cream-colored fur. "R-Rosebriar! Thank StarClan, you're alive!" Tears welled up in his eyes as he backed away to look at his mentor's crestfallen face. Rabbitstep's smile crumbled.

"For now," she muttered. Her once blue eyes now looked a dull grey color as she looked up at her apprentice. "These wounds were too fatal.. It was my time soon enough, anyhow. You mustn't grieve, for there are other things to worry about.." She looked as though

she wanted to tell him something, but decided against it.

"I don't understand," he howled desperately. "You can't go! I still need you! I'm not ready! There's so much more I need to learn; that I need to know!"

"If I thought you weren't ready, I wouldn't have made you a full medicine cat, dear Rabbitstep.." she pointed out. "Nonetheless, I need you to promise me something.."

"Anything!" he cried, tears now falling freely on to the cold, grey stone below them.

"I need you to promise that you will serve this Clan in the best way you can. That you will be loyal to, both, the warrior code and the medicine cat code. And, lastly," she trailed off, seemingly losing air. "Make me proud, Rabbitstep.." She lay her head down again as the light faded from her eyes.

"Rosebriar? Rosebriar!"

A wispy tone filled his ears, ruffling his fur with, somewhat of, a breeze. "Promise me.."

"I promise.."

Chapter Five

Heads whipped around and the low roar of murmurs and meows silenced as Rabbitstep emerged out into the clearing, his tail dragging the ground. He looked up at them with great sorrow in his amber eyes and swallowed hard, prepared for the endless waves of grief that would radiate off of them.

"Rosebriar is... Rosebriar's dead.." he managed to choke out before almost erupting into sobs. He fixed his eyes on the ground, his ears flattened against his head. "There was nothing I could do.. She- she didn't want anything done.. She kept saying it was her time."

Poppystar padded to stand beside him, laying her tail comfortingly over his shoulders. "I want Ravenfall and Dawnlight to bring Rosebriar out so we can prepare her for burial. Rabbitstep, I trust you've cleaned her and everything?"

He nodded, not saying anything and simply kept his eyes trained on the ground.

"Right then," she mewed, her voice cracking. She gave a nod to the two warriors she called upon earlier. The two dipped their head in return and began to make their way towards the Medicine Den.

Dawnlight touched her tail-tip to her brother's shoulder as she brushed past while Ravenfall gave a small nod.

He forced himself to look up. The first cat who's gaze met his was Rosebriar's brother, Brambleheart. The two held each other's gaze for a moment before both turned their head as Rosebriar's body appeared in the clearing, brought by Ravenfall and Dawnlight, who'd rejoined the crowd while the elders began to dress her body.

He moved his amber eyes away while he could. The next cat who caught his eyes was none other than Willowfrost. Her green

gaze bored into him like burning rays of sunlight. She looked as though she wanted to comfort him, but they both knew she couldn't do it here. *Not now.*. He told himself sternly.

Once the elders were finished, the Clan gradually made their way over to the medicine cat's side and crouched to bury their nose in her fur. Rabbitstep positioned himself up by her head, touching his nose to her cheek. *I miss you already.*. he thought before he began to shake with sobs, clenching his eyes shut.

His silent cries ceased as he felt a pelt brush up against his. His watery eyes opened and shifted to look at Willowfrost, who was staring back at him with her bright green eyes filled with sympathy.

"It's alright," she murmured, her voice baring audible. She nuzzled his cheek, too quick for anyone to notice.

Rabbitstep simply closed his eyes and rested his head in the fur of Rosebriar's shoulder, comforted by Willowfrost as she lay next to him. He blinked his eyes open for a split second and closed them again, but he opened them once more to make sure what he saw was right.

Ravenfall was standing at the entrance of the Warriors' den, his bright green eyes narrowed at the two of them. Rabbitstep flicked an ear in response, mouthing a 'what?'

The black tom only turned away swiftly and padded into the den, leaving Rabbitstep confused. He shot a glance back down at Willowfrost before resting his head back on Rosebriar's shoulder and closed his eyes.

Rabbitstep padded into the Elders' den the next morning after Rosebriar had been buried. Driftface and Sorreldust were cleaning the soil off their pelts when he walked in, dipping their heads to him as he entered.

He returned the greeting before heading over to Nyx, who was snoring softly. He prodded him awake and whispered, "Can I talk to you in my den?" he asked.

Nyx looked up at him, clearly confused before nodding and getting to his paws. Rabbitstep turned and exited the den, trotting back towards the Medicine den.

As he got about half way to it, Dapplekit scampered towards him. "Rabbitstep!" she called. "It's my apprentice ceremony today!"

"That's great," he called back for attempting to keep moving, but she halted in front of him.

"C-Can I talk to you, though?" she stammered, her eyes worried.

"Maybe later," he interrupted, hopping over her and hurrying the rest of the way to his den, leaving the kit looking crestfallen.

"Oh, okay.." he heard her sigh as he slipped in through the entrance.

He was intending to ask Nyx what he thought about the second part of the prophecy he'd received a few moons before Rosebriar's death.

I miss you so much, Rosebriar.. The medicine cat thought to himself.

His thoughts were cut off as Nyx trudged into the den. "Hello, young healer," he rasped and sat down. "What is it you need?"

"About two moons ago," Rabbitstep began. "I went to the Moonpool and spoke with StarClan. A cat by the name of Aspenfall told me an addition to the prophecy.."

"Ah, yes," Nyx nodded his head in understanding, as if he knew what it meant.

"Do you know what it means?" he asked urgently, leaning forward.

"Even if I did, I cannot tell you," he told him. "But yes, I do. And I know for a fact that you will figure it out very soon."

"Soon?" Rabbitstep exclaimed. "Why--"

"Let all cats gather to hear my words!"

His leader's call rang through the camp and Nyx dipped his head. "It seems as though our conversation is cut short for now." he murmured.

Rabbitstep sighed and led the way out of the Medicine den, expecting Nyx to sit next to him and talk once more after the meeting, but the cinnamon tom trotted over towards Sorreldust and Driftface to sit with them.

He pricked his ears as he leader began to speak. "Today we have two kits that will be named apprentices," he shifted her gaze to peer at Aspenkit, who looked excited, and Dapplekit, who looked-... rather sad. "Aspenkit, until you've earned your warrior name, you'll be known as Aspenpaw and Pebblelake will be your mentor."

The apprentice ran forward to touch noses with the larger grey tom, who did the same.

"Dapplekit, from this day on, until you've earned your--"

"I don't want to be a warrior.." A small murmured echoed out.

Poppystar paused and pricked her ears. "What was that?" she asked.

"I--" The she-cat swallowed and stared up at her leader.

"I don't want to be a warrior.."

Chapter Six

"What is it you mean?" Poppystar asked, her teeth gritted. She hated to be interrupted.

"I tried to tell Rabbitstep earlier," she squealed out, looking nervous. "I want to be a Medicine Cat.." she sighed after a moment of silence.

Poppystar turned her green gaze upon on the brown tom. "Is this true?"

Rabbitstep cleared his throat. "Yes, but I was sort of in a hurry at the time.." he meowed, trying to explain his antics to the she-kit.

The red-hued leader nodded in understanding, shifting to look back at the newly named apprentice. "Very well, Dapplepaw. If Rabbitstep will take you under his wing, you may be a medicine cat." She smiled before looking at Rabbitstep. "Well, Rabbitstep? What do you say?"

He thought about it for a moment. *Am I ready for an apprentice?* he asked himself. Though, looking at the she-cat's hopeful expression, he couldn't say 'No.'

"Of course," he mewed finally.

Poppystar dipped her head and Dapplepaw let out a joyful yelp and darted forward, almost bowling the brown tom over with her force. "Thank you! Thank you!"

The ThunderClan leader chuckled and flicked her tail, dismissing the meeting. She leaped down and padded towards the two medicine cats, smiling at them. "You two can travel to the Moonstone next Half-Moon, for there is a Gathering tonight."

Rabbitstep flattened his ears. "A Gathering? But it's Half-Moon!"

Poppystar nodded, rolling her eyes. "Spiderstar's requested our presence. He says we don't have to go, but he'd prefer if we did."

The brown medicine cat shooed Dapplepaw off to see her brother so he could speak with Poppystar. He narrowed his eyes. "We don't take orders from him."

"Indeed, but we've had no problems with him before, and I'd rather not start any now." she explained. "Besides, it isn't a normal Gathering; He asks that we only bring the deputy and the medicine cat."

"Would you rather me leave Dapplepaw here or bring her?" he asked, pricking his ears.

"Leave her, but there is someone I want you to bring."

"Who?" he asked cautiously.

"Spiderstar told me he had been given a prophecy from StarClan; That a loner would come to the forest and reside within the ranks of one of the four Clans, and save us all," she whispered, barely audible. "I told him of how we'd found Nyx, so he asked I bring him to this meeting."

"Does the rest of the Clan know about this?" he inquired. "If not, how will we slip out?"

"We won't." she meowed firmly, lifting her chin. "I am the Clan leader. No one may question me."

Rabbitstep nodded. That was true, but he still wasn't convinced that the Clan would question them, anyhow. "Right then," he sighed finally. "Shall I tell Nyx of this?"

The leader nodded, her green eyes glowing. "Yes, and tell him to keep quiet about it, if you will."

"Yes, Poppystar." he mewed, dipping his head.

After offering a farewell to his leader, he spun around to face the Elders' den. He trotted over and peeked inside. Sorreldust was cleaning her paws and Driftface was asleep. No sign of Nyx.

"Sorreldust?" he called, his voice dropped to a whisper.

The calico she-cat's head shot upward, her green eyes wide with alarm.

"Oh! Didn't mean to scare you," he apologized.

Her face was puzzled for a moment, and she squinted at him, as if-- trying to figure out.... Who he was..

"I-It's me," he reminded her. "Rabbitstep."

"Oh, hello, Rabbitstep!" she mewed cheerfully as realization and recognition flooded her gaze. "What can I do for you?"

The young medicine cat held back a few burning tears and managed to choke out, "I was looking for Nyx. Have you seen him?" He looked away, as if he couldn't bare to look at her.

"He went out to sun, I believe," she rasped thoughtfully. "'Said he was going to be by the Nursery..?"

"Thank you, Sorreldust.." he mewed before turning to pad away, his head low. He halted when he heard her call to him.

"It was nice to see you! I haven't seen you in days! Come back soon!"

He swallowed back the lump forming in his throat and chest as he passed onward.

I visited you yesterday..... he thought dreadfully.

"Nyx?" Rabbitstep whispered, prodding the sleeping tom with a paw.

"Hmm?" he hummed, his bright yellow eyes opening. "Ah, young healer, what is it you need?" he asked.

"I need you to come with me," he told him. "Poppystar and I need a favor."

"Right away," he rasped, pushing himself onto his paws and following Rabbitstep to Poppystar's den, where she and Swiftdrop

were waiting.

"Greetings, Nyx," Poppystar mewed, dipping her head. "I suspect you're wondering why you're here..? Well--"

"I know why you've called me here." he meowed simply and nonchalantly, her blank yellow gaze staring forward.

"I'm sorry?" Poppystar asked him to clarify.

"You've called me here because your doom is near.."

Chapter Seven

"Right, Dapplepaw," Rabbitstep meowed, pacing around his den frantically. "I want the marigold in this loft, just here, and the yarrow in the cleft below it." He indicated the two shelf-like clefts in the wall with his paw. "Have you got that?" he asked, turning to her.

"I- I think so.." she stuttered, looking nervous.

Realizing he was rushing her, he padded over and sat next to her. "It's just for the day," he promised. "And not even a full day!"

"I- I know, but.. Where are you even going?" Dapplepaw asked, her green eyes wide.

"I can't tell you that, young one," he mewed, touching his nose to her head. She bent her head in acceptance and sighed.

"Alright, I'll try my best.." she said dully.

"Then you'll never fail," he purred and got to his paws. He waved a farewell with his tail and exited the Medicine Den, heading over to where Poppystar, Swiftdrop, and Nyx were waiting by the entrance.

Poppystar rose to her paws when she spotted him and trotted over. "Did you tell her everything she needs to know?" she asked, her green eyes kind.

"Yes, I believe so," he meowed, raising his chin. "Let's go. 'Shouldn't keep Spiderstar waiting." He received a nod from his leader as she led the way out of camp, their Clanmates watching them curiously.

They headed towards the ShadowClan border so they could use the stepping stones to cross the river, leading to the Gathering Place. The patrol picked up pace and raced through the trees until

they reached the border.

Even being a fully grown and matured cat, his nose still wrinkled at the scent of ShadowClan's borders. Poppystar turned to be sure they were all here, and, surprisingly, Nyx was keeping up well. Then again, Rabbitstep stayed near the back of the group to be sure no one was left behind.

"Alright," Poppystar meowed, turning to face her patrol. "Let's cross here and--"

"Crossing here for what, exactly?" A sharp, edgy voice cut into Poppystar's words and their heads all shot around to see Ivystar, Longwhisker, and Fernstep emerge from the bushes.

Great... Rabbitstep thought. *ShadowClan cats. At this rate, we'll be late for the meeting..*

"Greetings, Ivystar," The ThunderClan leader dipped her head. "We're just on our way to Spiderstar's meeting. Just passing through."

"Oh," Ivystar sneered, her blue eyes blazing. "You're going to that? We are our own independent Clans! We don't take orders from him! You shouldn't show such weakness, Poppystar. I thought you were better than that.."

"You're right," Poppystar meowed evenly. "We are indeed our own independent Clans and shouldn't take orders from anyone else." Ivystar looked satisfied. "So, stop barking orders at me." The leader added sharply and flicked her tail for her Clanmates to follow as she stepped over the border.

The grey and white ShadowClan leader opened her mouth to retort, but stepped back to let the travelers pass, a defeated scowl on her face. She lifted her chin and called after them, "You're wasting your time!" she spat before spinning around and darting off.

The Gathering Place is a large, open clearing surrounded by rose

and thistle bushes with a heap of stones in one corner. At a normal Gathering, it is where a leader would stand to give their news, but today was different.

Once they'd arrived, Cedarstar and Spiderstar were there with their cats, awaiting the arrival of the other two Clans. They were small-talking as they waited, but they both paused to look at who had arrived.

Poppystar leaped onto the stones, followed by her Clanmates. "Apologies," the leader mewed, dipping her head. "We got held up."

"Perfectly fine," Spiderstar assured her. "Is ShadowClan coming? Do you know?"

Rabbitstep answered this time. "Oh, we know. They are not, unfortunately." he muttered, annoyance shining in his gaze.

Cedarstar, leader of RiverClan, chuckled. "Saw that one coming," he sighed. Cedarstar was a lean black tom with a muzzled singed with age and deep blue eyes. "Oh well; ShadowClan's always been that way.."

"Enough about them," Spiderstar interrupted. "Shall we begin?" He looked around approvingly as the cats around him politely dipped their heads.

Rabbitstep was reluctant to do so, but knew it was the respectful thing to do when it came to leaders. He bowed his head before raising it again so he could look at the leader steadily.

For the first time, Nyx actually looked nervous to be around all these cats. He barely let it show, but Rabbitstep knew it. He could feel it. He gave the loner a comforting glance. Nyx seemed thankful for his actions and offered a small smile before they both looked back toward Spiderstar, who has begun speaking.

"As I told you before, I received a prophecy--.."

They were cut off as a rustle sounded from the bushes around them. Cedarstar leaped to his paws, his teeth bared. "Show yourself!"

Gasps echoed throughout the gathered cats as Ivystar, Tigerwhisker, and Shadestep emerged from the brambles. The ShadowClan leader had a reluctant scowl on her face as she and her cats leaped up the stones to join the group.

"Glad you could make it," Spiderstar meowed politely, giving a friendly smile.

Ivystar only grumbled. "Get on with it.."

Spiderstar explained the prophecy StarClan had given him about Nyx and began asking the tom some questions. Nyx answered each question with a strong, level voice, indicating he was not frightened of the leaders.

"Why *have* you come here, Nyx?" Cedarstar repeated Spiderstar's question he'd asked only a moment ago.

Nyx sighed and closed his eyes. "I come from a far away place," he began. "I had a dream about each of the four Clans that lived here. It was a terrible dream of things that have yet to come. I traveled far because I couldn't let cats perish without any knowledge of why.." He trailed off as the sunlight reflecting off the stone beneath them disappeared and clouds covered the sky. There was a distant roar of thunder and it began to sprinkle.

Ivystar snorted, her fur bristling. "This is rather sudden, don't you think?" she muttered.

"But.." Nyx murmured, his eyes glazed.

"I'm too late.."

Chapter Eight

"What do you mean you're 'too late?'" Spiderstar asked, casting worried glances at the sky.

Nyx backed away from the cats until he was up on the very edge of the HighStone. "I didn't get here in time! I'm sorry! I'm so--"

He was silenced as a tall, flash of lightning struck the center of the HighStone, sending a crack through it.

The odd thing was, Rabbitstep notices, that the crack crept through each of the cat Clans, separating them. The Clan cats around them let out startled yowls as the rock shifted under their paws. All eyes then locked on Nyx as the crack spread to his side. There was a loud crumble as the end of the HighStone broke off, sending Nyx tumbling down the rock pile.

He seemed to hit his head on every jutting stone until he hit the soil with a thud. Rabbitstep carefully pushed past his Clanmates and shuffled his way down to the old cats' side. He felt his whole body before setting his paws on his neck. It was snapped.

Rabbitstep stepped back from Nyx, his eyes glittering. "He's dead.." he sighed, his tail drooping.

The cats upon the rock looked down, horrified at Nyx's limp body. They each picked their way carefully down the pile of stones and down to Rabbitstep's side.

"What will we do now..?" Ivystar murmured.

Rabbitstep followed Poppystar and Swiftdrop back across the river, Ivystar and her Clanmates behind them.

Once they'd reached the bank, the two Clans traded nods to one another and parted ways. Poppystar led the way over the border

and back into ThunderClan territory.

Rabbitstep halted, rather suddenly, as a sharp tang stung the back of his throat. "P-Poppystar," he murmured. "Do you smell that?"

His Clan leader stopped in her tracks and raised her muzzle to the sky. Her green eyes widened.

"Smoke.." she choked out.

The three ThunderClan cats raced back toward to camp, only to find it engulfed in flames and deserted.

"Oh, StarClan, no!" Poppystar screeched and darted off into the trees, Swiftdrop racing after her.

Rabbitstep stood there, bewildered at the sight of camp. Dens were crumbling into piles of shriveled leaves and the small rocks and stones were stained with soot.

The medicine cat turned to catch up with his leader before he heard a wail behind him.

"Help! Please help me!" a female voice cried. One that he knew all too well.

Willowfrost..

Chapter Nine

Rabbitstep darted into camp, avoiding the flames and flying embers as he followed the voice calling for help. "I'm coming, Willowfrost!" he called, leaping over a fallen branch that blocked the entrance of the Warriors' Den. "Are you in here?"

Bright green eyes shone from the back of the den and Willowfrost crept forward, her steps wary. "R-Rabbitstep?" she wimpered, panic clear on her face. He nodded and motioned for her to jump over the branch and she did, stumbling when she landed.

"Are you alright?" he asked worriedly, looking her over as he landed beside her.

"Y-yeah.. I think so.." she mewed, looking behind her as the den caved in. "That was close," she whispered, looking Rabbitstep in the eyes. "You saved me."

"I-I guess so," he stuttered, his ears burning. "We should get out of here and find our Clanmates."

She nodded and licked Rabbitstep's cheek before they darted, side by side, out of the burning camp. Willowfrost stopped and turned around, watching on the ravine-top as the bramble walls surrounding their home crumbled and the camp was completely engulfed. Any longer and they would've been in there. "Our home.." she murmured.

Rabbitstep padded to stand by her side and rested his tail soothingly on her shoulder. "I know," he sighed. "But we have to go find the others. There's no telling where they've ended up." His darker green gaze rested in hers and she drooped her head.

"You're right." She casted one last glance at their camp before she turned to follow the medicine cat. "Let's go, then."

Rabbitstep led the way through the trees, periodically calling out their Clanmates names, even though Willowfrost remained silent. She walked with her head and tail low and her gaze locked on the ground. He cast worried glances over his shoulder every now and then, checking that she was still following.

"I'm really sorry this happened," he murmured, falling into step with her. He'd given up calling out his Clanmates names. They were gone.

"They're gone, aren't they?" she whispered, her voice barely audible and her green eyes flitted up to meet his.

The medicine cat heaved a sigh, his ears drooping. "Yes.. I'm sorry.."

The grey she-cat shrugged. "It isn't your fault," she said, her voice tight and dull. She sat down and curled her tail over her paws, her gaze shifted to the ground again before she closed her brilliant green eyes. "It isn't anyone's fault.. but *StarClan's*.." she spat, her eyes flashing open to glare at the sky.

"Willowfrost, no.. They--"

"You still have faith in them?" she demanded, leaping her to paws. "How can you? How can anyone when they've willed this upon us?" She began to shake.

"Willowfrost, calm down," he explained, trying to coax her. "I don't think they had a say in it. They only warned me that--" He was cut off as Willowfrost looked up at him, her eyes furious.

"They *warned* you?" she muttered. "And you didn't tell anyone? What is the matter with you?"

"I was still contemplating what it meant! I didn't know this would.. I- I didn't-.." He let out a hiss. "Nyx was the only one who knew what would happen, and right when he was going to warn us he died!"

"Nyx is dead?"

"Y-yes.. StarClan killed him.." he muttered in defeat, his voice raspy. "We would've been too late anyway.."

Rabbitstep sat down, his head hanging low and his eyes closed. "You're right though," he rasped. "I should've told someone.. Maybe then we would've been prepared.."

Willowfrost was no longer angry, in fact, she was rather sympathetic. She padded over and sat next to him, twining her tail with his to comfort him.

"Don't you get it..?" he asked, his eyes clouded. Willowfrost looked at him, confused.

"ThunderClan is gone.. and it's because of me.."

Epilogue

And so, Rabbitstep and Willowfrost moved on to become loners and find new territory, while the other warriors of ThunderClan either became loners, kittypets, rogues or joined one of the other three Clans, hoping they wouldn't be recognized.

The other three Clans had no clue what had happened to ThunderClan after the fire, but stayed alert, as they may be picked off one by one by different disasters until the Clans are no more.

Or maybe, one day, ThunderClan will reform and rejoin the Clans around the lake, but for now...

Where are they?